

EXHIBIT 4

News > **California News** • News

PG&E transmission line eyed in Camp Fire had collapsed during 2012 storm

Inmate Andy Gardner of Yuba City takes a nap after working a 24-hour-shift to keep the Poe Fire under control Sept. 7, 2001 along Highway 70 north of Oroville, CA. The Poe fire started by a down PG&E power line and is one of many incidents involving the Feather River Canyon and the utility. (Photo by Max Whittaker/Getty Images)

By **MATTHIAS GAFNI** | mgafni@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
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PULGA — In December 2012, a fierce winter storm toppled five steel towers that support the same PG&E transmission line that malfunctioned minutes before the Camp Fire roared to life.

Now, six years later, the 115,000-volt Caribou-Palermo transmission line near Poe Dam and the tiny resort town of Pulga is again under the microscope. PG&E reported damage to it around 6:15 a.m. Nov. 8, about 15 minutes before flames were first reported under the high-tension wires, according to a regulatory filing and firefighter radio traffic. A distribution line in nearby Concow also malfunctioned a half hour later, possible sparking a second fire.

The problems underscore the utility's struggles to maintain and safely operate equipment that serves residents living in the rural towns that dot the Feather River Canyon, where every morning cold air from the Sierras rushes down the valley walls to create treacherous winds. Downed trees and power outages are so common in the Yankee Hill and Concow communities that residents often keep chainsaws in their vehicles and generators gassed up — just in case. PG&E paid settlements from fires in September 2001 and October 2017 from trees or vegetation coming into contact with power lines.

Back in December 2012, a series of wet, winter storms, with winds at times reaching 55 mph, drenched the Feather River canyon, knocking over the Caribou-Palermo transmission towers.



A Google satellite image shows Poe Dam and the transmission lines that run parallel to the Feather River on the canyon walls.

Little is known about the incident. PG&E and the California Public Utilities Commission did not provide specifics.

“We appreciate the interest in the details associated with these incidents, but we are not able to share more information beyond what is included in the reports we’ve filed,” said PG&E spokeswoman Lynsey Paulo.

But some details appear in a July 16, 2013, letter to the California Public Utilities Commission from then-Vice President of Regulatory Relations Brian Cherry. He wrote about the planned fix: “To repair damage caused by a winter storm event, PG&E proposes to replace six consecutive lattice-steel towers with new towers on the Caribou-Palermo 115 Kilovolt (kV) Power Line,” he wrote. “Spanning the Plumas-Butte County border, the repair segment is located up slope and west of Highway 70 and generally parallel to the unpaved Pulga Road in a remote area of the Feather River Canyon within Plumas National Forest.”

The construction project, which is in the direct vicinity of the first reported transmission line problem the morning of the Camp Fire, was scheduled for completion by the end of 2013 but wasn’t finished until 2016, according to PG&E..

Attorney Frank Pitre, who is co-counsel representing more than 600 clients suing PG&E over last year’s North Bay fires, said an independent audit of the 2012 incident and the condition of the towers needs to be done.

"The cause or causes of the five transmission towers that collapsed in 2012 along this line must be thoroughly investigated, to determine if any of the same causes are associated with the malfunctions reported before the Camp Fire started," Pitre said. "If so, then the multi-billion dollar question for PG&E to answer will be: 'What did they do to assure themselves that other towers and equipment along the same line were safe for continued operation during high wind conditions?' "

In his explanation of the 2012 project, Cherry cited the "extreme topography" surrounding the transmission lines, adding that the utility used wood poles to temporarily restore service back then. Transmission lines carry high voltage between steel towers, while distribution lines are smaller and send electricity to individual customers often by wooden poles.

Wind also played a role a decade earlier, when a downed PG&E line nearly threatened Paradise and the surrounding community.

On Sept. 6, 2001, heavy winds near Poe Powerhouse, south of Poe Dam, knocked over a dead 100-foot-tall Ponderosa pine that crashed into three backup power lines running into the PG&E hydroelectric facility there, sparking a fire. Multiple fires converged into what would become known as the Poe Fire, quickly gobbling up more than 1,000 acres in the Big Bend and Yankee Hill communities southeast of Paradise. The winds died down, slowing the blaze, but early morning winds the next day topping 30 mph and a humidity at less than 7 percent stoked the fire a second time.

Firefighters made contingency plans in case the fire jumped Lake Oroville toward Paradise. It became so dangerous that fire officials nearly evacuated themselves from their staging area, according to reports at the time.

"Thank God," Cal Fire Incident Commander Loyde Johnson told the Chico Enterprise-Record at the time. "(It's) a miracle so many homes were saved, so few homes lost and no major injuries or fatalities.



A helicopter works to keep the Poe Fire under control Sept. 7, 2001 north of Oroville, CA. The Poe fire was caused by downed PG&E power lines and led to a \$5.9 million settlement with the utility in 2006. (Photo by Max Whittaker/Getty Images)

"This was not so much a fire as it was a firestorm," he said. "We feel that by residents complying with evacuation orders, lives were saved."

The Poe Fire burned 8,333 acres and caused more than \$6 million in damage, destroying 40 homes, 152 outbuildings and 146 vehicles. Fifteen people were injured, including four firefighters.

Poe Fire - FINAL UPDATE	
INCIDENT INFORMATION	
Last updated:	9-12-01 at 6:30 a.m. - FINAL UPDATE
Start Date/Time:	9-6-01 at 8:21 a.m.
Administrative Unit:	Butte Unit
Location:	Butte County, 14 miles north of Oroville, Jarbo Gap/Yankee Hill area.
Acres Burned:	8,333
Containment:	100%
Control:	Full control expected on 9-14-01 at 6 p.m.
Structures Destroyed:	36. 26 residences, 8 outbuildings, 2 commercial properties.
Threatened:	N/A
Evacuations:	N/A
Injuries:	22
Cause:	Tree into powerline.
Cooperating Agencies:	CDF, Local Government, CDC, OES, USFS
Total Fire Personnel:	1,659 (1,157 CDF)
Fire crews:	54 (45 CDF)
Engines:	87 (57 CDF)
Airtankers:	N/A
Helicopters:	5 (1 CDF)
Dozers:	19 (4 CDF)
Water tenders:	23
Costs to date:	\$5.4 million
Incident Base Location:	N/A
Major Incident Command Team:	CDF Major Incident Command Team #4 in charge of fire.
Conditions:	Mop-up of fire is ongoing. Demobilization of resources ongoing....

In 2006, PG&E reached a \$5.9 million settlement with 122 residents who sued the utility and some of its contractors. PG&E admitted no wrongdoing in the agreement.

Chico attorney Ken Royce represented the homeowners and said PG&E attempted to blame an arsonist but had failed to remove the large dead tree that was within 40 feet of its equipment.

"It's always the same story," Royce said in a phone interview Monday. "I've been fighting these bastards for over 30 years.

The final Cal Fire report from the 2001 Poe Fire indicated that a tree into power lines caused the blaze east of Paradise. (Cal Fire)

"Here's the deal. PG&E needs to be dismantled and whoever's responsible needs to do some time," he said."

Last month, the Butte County District Attorney reached a \$1.5 million settlement with PG&E in connection with three wildfires sparked in October 2017 by vegetation hitting distribution lines. The money was to go toward a four-year Butte County program — Enhanced Fire Prevention and Communications Program — to keep vegetation away from power lines and reduce wildfires by hiring four defensible space inspectors.

One of the blazes, the Honey Fire, burned about 150 acres and threatened the town of Paradise. Those fires were again sparked late in the fire season during an "extreme wind event," the DA's office said.

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